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Contras to Seek More Private Donations

Nicaraguan Rebel Reports \$25 Million Raised, Mostly Abroad

By DOYLE McMANUS, *Times Staff Writer*

DALLAS—The leader of the largest Nicaraguan rebel group and his chief American fund-raiser said Tuesday that they plan to continue soliciting private donations for arms, ammunition and military vehicles, now that Congress has agreed to resume humanitarian aid for their cause.

Adolfo Calero, president of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, and John K. Singlaub, a retired Army general who has been the group's most visible U.S. fund-raiser, said they have received nearly \$25 million in contributions over the last 15 months since Congress first cut off aid to the rebels, known as contras.

Most of that money has come from outside the United States, they said, from wealthy individuals, from corporations with interests in Nicaragua and—Calero hinted—from several foreign governments.

But ironically, now that Congress has agreed to permit \$27 million in non-lethal U.S. aid to begin flowing Oct. 1 to the contras, the anti-Communist forces fear that some of their private donations may dry up.

Now Must Work Harder

"We're going to have to work harder to get less," Singlaub said in an interview. "A lot of people overseas think the CIA is getting weapons to the contras in spite of the law, and it's hard to convince them that it's not so."

"Congress," Calero said, "has made it clear that it is only offering humanitarian support, but we need more than medicine and food and uniforms. We need weapons and ammunition."

To buy arms for the contra

troops, which he estimates number 18,000, Calero has been making the rounds of wealthy sympathizers in the United States and Latin America. He is spending this week here at the annual convention of the World Anti-Communist League, a network of conservative groups from 98 countries, of which Singlaub is chairman.

Raising money inside the United States for weapons to be sent abroad is illegal, so Singlaub and Calero say they rely entirely on overseas contributions for their arms-buying accounts.

Of almost \$25 million in total contributions, they said, only \$5 million to \$10 million has been received from Americans. "Most of it is clearly from donors overseas," said Singlaub, who retired from the Army as a major general in 1978 after publicly criticizing President Jimmy Carter's foreign policies.

Other contra officials have said that most of their weapons come from friendly Latin American governments such as Honduras and El Salvador, both of which are major recipients of U.S. military aid. Calero refused to confirm their accounts but seemed to acknowledge that his group was receiving some official help.

"It (the list of donors) could include countries," he said, smiling broadly. "The United States is the only country in the world that discusses its covert aid openly. Countries can get aid to you through a corporation, or through an individual, or through a bill of lading."

But he refused to identify any of his contributors, whether individuals or regimes. "If we put our fingers on the sources . . . we'd blow up the whole thing—nobody

would give us anything," he contended.

Calero and Singlaub said they have been talking with wealthy American conservatives in search of contributions to buy trucks, ambulances and transport helicopters, which they expect Congress to exclude from the category of "humanitarian" aid.

One of their biggest donors, they said, was Ellen Garwood of Austin, Tex., who recently gave \$65,000 toward the purchase of a used helicopter. The \$100,000 aircraft, now being refitted, will soon go into battle with the name of "Lady Ellen" painted on its fuselage.

'Didn't Give Us a Dime'

Not all potential donors are quick to give, however. Calero noted that he spent a day in Colorado last week with Joseph Coors, the ultrarich, ultraconservative beer magnate, "and he didn't give us a dime."

Singlaub has sent thousands of fund-raising letters on the contras' behalf, noting that contributions to his U.S. Council for World Freedom are tax deductible.

The effort was thrown briefly into confusion last month, however, when it was reported that the council had told the Internal Revenue Service, in an application for tax-deductible status, that it did not plan to send "materiel" to the contras.

Singlaub said that issue has since been cleared up with the IRS. "It's always been quite clear from our constitution and bylaws that we planned to raise money and materiel for the freedom fighters," he said. "The IRS was smarter than the media on that. . . . There's no problem there."